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Written on MARCH 11, 2015 AT 8:00 AM by SVANDERWERFF

Meet the Scientists: Dr. Philip Vernon

Filed under COMMUNICATION, FLEET AND THE FLEET MARINE FORCE, FORCE HEALTH AND SAFETY [NO COMMENTS]

Editor's note: Article was originally posted Dec. 15, 2014 in DOD Live, official blog of Department of Defense.



“It was clear that NAMRU-SA would provide me with the specific kind of experience and professional development I would need to become a well-rounded and successful research scientist.”

Meet the Scientists is an Armed with Science segment highlighting the men and women working in the government realms of science, technology, research and development. The greatest minds working on the greatest developments of our time. If you have someone you'd like AWS to highlight for this segment, email Jessica L. Tozer at ArmedWithScienceDMA@mail.mil



WHO: Dr. Philip J. Vernon. Earned his doctorate in immunology from the [University Of Pittsburgh School Of Medicine](#).

TITLE: Dr. Philip J. Vernon is a Post-doctoral Fellow his contribution as a Postdoc focused on using clinical enzymatic debridement agents against patient strains of multi-drug resistant Staphylococcus aureus biofilms. [Naval Medical Research Unit – San Antonio's\(NAMRU-SA\)](#), Combat

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April 2015 (4)

March 2015 (21)

February 2015 (16)

January 2015 (12)

“I knew I would receive immediate gratification for my work at this comprehensive military research center.”

Casualty Care and Operational Medicine, Immunodiagnostics and Bioassay Development Department.

MISSION: To use cutting-edge, product-driven research to aid in the military and help make life for the warfighter more manageable. To do that, Dr. Vernon uses his skills as a research scientist to better understand the trials and tribulations of service members. *Especially those injured in combat.*

So tell me a little bit about yourself and the mission at NAMRU-SA.

“Naval Medical Research Unit San Antonio (NAMRU-SA) is a [Navy](#) research facility focusing on interdisciplinary biomedical sciences to improve medical outcomes related to combat casualty care and craniofacial health and restorative medicine. This unique approach to research would not be possible without our broad team of scientists and clinicians from across the United States encompassing molecular and cellular biologists, biomedical engineers, microbiologists, immunologists, physiologists, and clinicians (*from trauma surgeons to dentists*).”

What is your role at NAMRU-SA?

“When the opportunity to work with NAMRU-SA was presented to me, I knew that a scientific position here was exactly what I was looking for. While earning my doctorate in [immunology](#) from the University Of Pittsburgh School Of Medicine, I already knew I wanted to follow a path distinct from academic or institutional research. *My investigation into the work being conducted at NAMRU-SA proved that, in addition to cutting edge, product-driven research, there was purposeful integration of scientific disciplines and a value-conscious approach to research in practice.* It was clear that NAMRU-SA would provide me with the specific kind of experience and professional development I would need to become a well-rounded and successful research scientist.”

“Most importantly, I knew I would receive immediate gratification for my work at this comprehensive military research center and that I would be a part of a team making a real difference for the war fighter.”

What is the goal or the mission of your work and what do you hope it will achieve?

“The entire staff at NAMRU-SA understands that given the advancement of scientific technology and understanding, medical research can no longer successfully proceed as a compartmentalized effort. In contrast to my academic experience where many departments functioned as distinct entities studying a single aspect of a problem without regard for the potential insights other disciplines could lend to the research solution, NAMRU-SA’s approach is not only necessary, but it makes great scientific sense. Interdisciplinary research focused on problems that cut right



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December 2014 (17)
November 2014 (11)
October 2014 (15)
September 2014 (20)
August 2014 (14)
July 2014 (13)
June 2014 (8)
May 2014 (11)
April 2014 (9)
March 2014 (14)
February 2014 (7)
January 2014 (7)
December 2013 (7)
November 2013 (12)
October 2013 (7)
September 2013 (14)
August 2013 (13)
July 2013 (11)
June 2013 (22)
May 2013 (15)
April 2013 (14)
March 2013 (14)
February 2013 (14)
January 2013 (12)
December 2012 (11)
November 2012 (11)
October 2012 (7)
September 2012 (9)
August 2012 (12)
July 2012 (13)
June 2012 (17)
May 2012 (22)
April 2012 (14)
March 2012 (13)
February 2012 (14)
January 2012 (13)
December 2011 (13)
November 2011 (20)
October 2011 (22)

across the borders of subject matter or disciplines, yielding a more holistic view of the problem under investigation.”

“For example, the complex nature of the injuries that we address in our department such as hemorrhagic shock and resuscitation necessitates our unique research approach.”

“Biomedical engineers seek to innovate and enhance tourniquet technology, utilize nanoparticles to construct biologically compatible materials for both reparative and anti-microbial purposes, and develop novel methods for field sterilization of clinical instruments. Biomedical scientists and clinicians are engaged in extensively characterizing the physiologic and molecular response to trauma as well as therapeutic biologics, blood products, and tissue preservation strategies.”

In your own words, what is it about your unique approach to your work that makes it so significant?

“A fully-integrated approach allows us to function as a cohesive unit, limit redundancy and reactivity, and complete projects in a truly comprehensive manner. Importantly, it gives us a ‘tool box’ that can be applied to new questions and challenges as they arise with minimal recalibration as each identified knowledge gap is approached from many perspectives.”

What is the most impressive or beneficial thing about working at NAMRU-SA and why?

“Operating within this paradigm translates into an abundance of opportunities for me to grow and develop as a scientist. As an immunologist, I would rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to interface with bio-engineers and materials scientists in academia, and my work would reflect a much smaller focus. Here, I am able to work in multiple areas simultaneously which necessitates constant learning and a readiness to engage in new projects – aspects I find very exciting professionally.”

What would you say is the most interesting or rewarding thing about working at NAMRU-SA?

“NAMRU-SA meets the challenges posed by ever-changing revenue streams and sustains a continued level of output by instituting an interdisciplinary team to address multiple questions and fully utilizing resources to seize these opportunities in a manner befitting our core mission. By doing so, we are significantly contributing to the enhancement of care to our warfighters at home and abroad.”

“Personally, my experience at NAMRU-SA thus far has been very engaging. Being a part of a team in this enterprise has been incredibly rewarding from collaborating on new and exciting projects to piecing together proposals for extramural funding. Although research has traditionally been viewed as a very independent endeavor, the evolution of how we conduct our work necessitates a team-oriented mentality which I find to be much more intellectually stimulating and energizing compared to working on my own. Additionally, working within the confines of the [Department of Defense](#) requires adaptability and forward-thinking, and these are the kinds of skills that are necessary for successful science.”

If you could go anywhere in time and space, where would you go and why?

“I would love to visit the [Great Library of Alexandria](#) at its height. I’ve always been a huge admirer of classical antiquity. I find the culture and philosophies of ancient civilizations to be inspiring forward-thinking and the loss and dispersion of knowledge that inevitably proceeded their falls both tragic and romantic.”

September 2011 (12)
August 2011 (16)
July 2011 (10)

“To pour over the collective knowledge of some of the world’s most famous naturalists, chemists, physicists, mathematicians and philosophers would truly be the opportunity of a lifetime.”

“Aside from the scrolls and breath taking architecture, I can only imagine who I might run into during my visit. The chances of meeting some of the men and women who drastically shaped history would be high at such an institution.”

Thanks to Dr. Philip Vernon for contributing to this article, and for his contributions to the science and technological communities.

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